

A C A P S U L E H I S T O R Y  
O F  
CLATSOP COUNTY, OREGON

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## P r e f a c e

An exciting myth developed in the 16th Century regarding a "Northwest Passage" or strait on the north coast of North America which supposedly connected the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. By the mid-1700's, much international interest focused on the legendary "Great River of the West," now known as the Columbia.

In August 1775 Spanish mariner/explorer Bruno Heceta discovered the mouth of the river but was unable to explore it. Subsequent voyages of exploration by such famous British navigators as Captain Cook, John Meares, and George Vancouver either passed the river mouth unknowingly or denied evidence of its actual location.

That left it to explorers of the newly created United States of America to discover and begin settling what is now Clatsop County and later the Pacific Northwest as a whole.

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May 11, 1792 The merchant ship Columbia, captained by Bostonian Robert Gray, found and entered the Columbia River after several weeks of coastal exploration. Gray remained on the lower river for ten days trading with the local--and generally friendly--Clatsop and Chinook Indians. He named the river after his ship but departed without exploring upriver. This was left to trappers and traders, subsequent maritime voyagers--and to an historic U.S. Government expedition mounted in St. Louis in 1804.

November 15, 1805 The Lewis and Clark expedition, the first American party to cross the continent, arrived at the Pacific Ocean near present-day Astoria, Oregon. The party built and wintered at Fort Clatsop on today's Lewis and Clark River until March 23, 1806, when they began their return trip. (They enjoyed six rain-free days during their 4-months stay.)

Two notable sidetrips within present-day Clatsop County were made in January 1806. The first was to what is now Seaside, where seawater was boiled to obtain salt. A smaller expedition proceeded south to Elk (now Ecola) Creek in present-day Cannon Beach to barter with Indians for oil and blubber from a beached whale.

March 1811 Fur trading tycoon John Jacob Astor dispatched a seagoing expedition to establish a trading post at the mouth of the Columbia. It sailed from New York on the ship Tonquin in late 1810 and reached its destination on March 24, 1811. Construction was soon begun on Fort Astoria, which became the oldest North American settlement west of the Rocky Mountains.

December 13, 1813 On this date during the War of 1812, a British force from the sloop-of-war Raccoon took possession of Fort Astoria and environs and changed its name to Fort George. (The trading post had already been sold by the Astor interests to the British-owned North West Company.)

1818 Under the terms of the 1814 Treaty of Ghent, the U.S. regained possession of Fort Astoria/Fort George.

1824 Salmon trading with the Orient was established. The salmon exported from the Columbia were preserved by salting and smoking.

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JUNE 22, 1844 The Provisional Government of the Territory of Oregon officially created Clatsop County. The county seat was established in the hamlet of Lexington on the Skipanon River, and the first election of county officers was held in June 1845. (Oregon did not become a state until 1859.)  
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August 1844 "Hunt Mill," the first sawmill in Clatsop County, began operation. It was located at Cathlamet Head near the Columbia River and the town of Clifton. Part of its lumber output was exported to California and the Hawaiian Islands.

September 10, 1846 The schooner USS Shark was wrecked on South Spit at the entrance to the Columbia. When the ship broke up, part of its hull--containing three cannons--drifted south along the coast and reportedly washed up near present-day Arch Cape, but was soon buried in sand. In 1891 a new post office in that locale was designated "Cannon Beach."

September 1846 The oldest continuing church site west of the Rocky Mountains--the Clatsop Plains Presbyterian Church--was organized. Its tract includes a pioneer cemetery where some of the earliest settlers in Clatsop County are buried.

April 1847 Pursuant to a state pilotage law passed in 1846, the first pilot for the Columbia River bar was appointed.

1847 The first U.S. Post Office west of the Rockies was established in Astoria.

1850 The first steamboat built in the Pacific Northwest was launched in Astoria. The Columbia traded profitably on the Columbia and lower Willamette Rivers for a number of years.

Summer House, the first hotel in what is now Seaside, was built on the present-day Seaside golf course.

August 5, 1851 A treaty was signed at Tansy Point (now in Warrenton) by the U.S. Government to compensate the Clatsop Indian tribe for most of the land in present-day Clatsop County and for restricted fishing rights. The treaty provided for \$15,000 to be paid in cash and supplies over a 10-year period. (Although this treaty was never ratified by Congress, the Clatsops did receive partial compensation in 1912.)

October 1851 The county court met for the last time in Lexington, and the Clatsop County seat was moved to Astoria.

September 1855 The first official Clatsop County courthouse was completed in Astoria. It was located in the "McClure's Astoria" section, which won out over four contending local sites in a June 1854 election.

January 1856 Astoria was officially incorporated as a village. During the ensuing years, post offices were established in smaller Clatsop County towns. They included: Clifton and Jewell (1874); Svensen (1877); Knappa (1891); Elsie (1892); and Arch Cape (1912).

August 16, 1864 Astoria's first newspaper, the Marine Gazette, published its inaugural edition.

October 1864 Construction was completed on Fort Stevens near the entrance to the Columbia. Built to repel possible Confederate gunboat attacks, the fort mounted 34 muzzle-loading cannons.

1865 The first life-saving station at the entrance to the Columbia was opened at Cape Disappointment (later Fort Canby).

1866 The first salmon cannery on the Columbia was built on the Washington side. This paved the way for the first cannery in Astoria, which opened seven years later. By 1883 there were 39 canneries and as many as 1,700 fishery boats on the lower Columbia.

1870 Most of the land between the mouth of the Columbia and Tillamook Head was incorporated into a town called "Clatsop." This action permitted the passage of laws to regulate cattle grazing and alleviate soil erosion and sand dune shifting.

1871-1872 The Seaside House, the Oregon coast's largest and most luxurious resort hotel, was built by railroad magnate Ben Holladay. Its name was later adopted by the city which developed there.

1875 The Point Adams Lighthouse entered service at Fort Stevens. It was retired in 1899.

May 1, 1876 The daily newspaper Astorian was launched. Its descendant was merged with the Astoria Evening Budget in 1930 to become the Evening Astorian-Budget. It was renamed the Daily Astorian in 1960.

December 1879 The town of Lexington, onetime Clatsop County seat, was officially vacated after most of its commercial activities had moved to Astoria.

January 21, 1881 A principal Northwest navigational aid, the manned Tillamook Rock Lighthouse, entered service. It was operated by the U.S. Light House Service and later by the U.S. Coast Guard--from 1939 to 1957, when it was retired.

Records now show more than 200 shipwrecks near the mouth of the Columbia River, which became known as "The Graveyard of the Pacific."

1888 The first public service railroad in Clatsop County--between Young's Bay and Seaside--entered service.

An Astoria cannery operator bought 400 acres of land from the pioneer Gearhart family and built the original Gearhart Hotel.

1894 The annual Astoria Regatta was inaugurated. It was combined with the Salmon Derby fishing contest in the 1930's.

January 28, 1898 A cannon from the USS Shark--wrecked in 1846--was discovered in the sand near Arch Cape, which already had a "Cannon Beach" post office. This facility was later moved north to the town site which now bears its name.

May 16, 1898 Rail service along the Columbia River between Astoria and Portland was inaugurated by the Astoria and Columbia River Railroad. This line was later extended from Astoria to Gearhart and Seaside.

January 1899 Nearly a score of salmon canneries on the lower Columbia combined into what became the Columbia River Packers Association. In 1901 this new organization built a cannery in Bristol Bay, Alaska.

1899 The cities of Seaside, Warrenton, and New Astoria (later Hammond) were all incorporated.

March 25, 1905 The weekly Seaside Signal newspaper began publication.

1918 The City of Gearhart was incorporated.

May 1921 The first regular ferry service between Astoria and McGowan, Washington, was inaugurated by ferry boat Tourist No. 1, which carried both autos and passengers.

December 8, 1922 A fire of unknown origin destroyed virtually the entire business district of Astoria--32 blocks valued at \$11 million. The mostly wooden buildings--many on pilings--were rebuilt with concrete.

1926 The 125-foot Astoria Column was built on Coxcomb Hill in Astoria. It was modeled upon the Vendome Column in Paris and the Trajan Column in Rome, and provides panoramic views of the ocean, the Columbia River, northwest Oregon, and southwest Washington.

January 1932 Short Sands Beach, south of Cannon Beach, was donated to the state for park purposes. Subsequent donations and purchases led to the presentday Oswald West State Park comprising 2,500 acres.

February 1932 The 450-acre nucleus of Ecola State Park just north of Cannon Beach was donated to the state by several Portland families. The name Ecola was bestowed because of the park's proximity to Ecola Creek, where Captain Clark's party traded with the Indians for the remains of a stranded whale or "Ecoli" as the Indians called it. The park has since been expanded to 1,400 acres, with an additional 1,400 acres of non-state property under its management.

July 1932 Saddle Mountain State Park in central Clatsop County was established. With later additions, it now comprises some 3,000 acres.

September 7, 1936 The Port of Astoria Municipal Airport was dedicated and officially began operating. It was a joint undertaking by the Port, the cities of Astoria and Warrenton, and Clatsop County.

August 31, 1939 Tongue Point Naval Air Station, sited on land donated by the citizens of Astoria and Clatsop County, was dedicated. After World War II the port docks became a temporary berthing area for ships (mostly freighters) of the Pacific Reserve Fleet. The Tongue Point naval activities began phasing out in 1959.

June 21, 1942 Fort Stevens' Battery Russell (two 10-inch "disappearing" guns) was the target of several shells fired by a Japanese submarine. No casualties or serious damage resulted.

March 1946 Controlling interest in the Columbia River Packers Association, Inc. was sold to Transamerica, Inc., and the new company began expanding production and marketing. Canning of frozen tuna from Japan began in Clatsop County in the early 1950's, and from South America in the '60's.

1949-1950 The Cannon, the first newspaper in Cannon Beach, was published by a high school student. It was succeeded by the biweekly Cannon Beach Gazette beginning in 1976.

July 1954 Warrenton's first regular newspaper, the Columbia Beacon, was launched.

1955 A replica of Lewis and Clark's Fort Clatsop was built on the original site and opened to the public. In 1958 it became a National Memorial managed by the National Park Service. A visitor center was added in 1961 and additional expansion took place in 1992-93. Fort Clatsop draws thousands of visitors each year.

The City of Cannon Beach was incorporated.

April 1956 Fort Stevens State Park on the south entrance to the Columbia River was opened. Acquired largely from Clatsop County, the 3,800-acre camping park encompasses Fort Stevens and Battery Russell, Coffenbury Lake, and the remains of the sailing vessel Peter Iredale, which ran aground in October 1906.

1958 Clatsop Community College, headquartered in Astoria, began operation.

Good Friday, 1964 Triggered by an Alaskan earthquake, a tsunami (tidal wave) struck Cannon Beach. Much lowlying property was damaged, the main bridge into town was washed away, and there was extensive flooding but no loss of life. The town thereafter developed an audio Community Warning System to cope with potential disasters.

1965 The first annual Sandcastle Contest was held in (and on) Cannon Beach.

A Job Corps center was established at Tongue Point.

August 1966 The Astoria-Megler vehicular toll bridge across the Columbia River was opened. (Financing the bridge substantially with term revenue bonds enabled its tolls to be removed in early 1994.)

July 1971 The Seaside Convention Center was opened. It is the largest such facility on the Oregon coast.

May 11, 1982 The Columbia River Maritime Museum, founded in 1962, moved to its present quarters on the Columbia River in Astoria. It is a magnet for tourists and local residents alike.

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